

REMARKS

By the above actions, claims 1 and 4 have been amended. In view of these actions and the following remarks, reconsideration of this application is now requested.

As a preliminary matter, Substitute Drawings FIGs. 7-8 correcting the informalities noted in the present Office Action were filed on September 26, 2002. Accordingly, the objection to the drawings is deemed moot.

The rejection of independent claims 1 and 4 and claims 2-3 and 5-6 dependent therefrom based upon Applicants' admitted prior art and *Mori* (U.S. Patent No. 6,004,631) is inappropriate, because Applicants' admitted prior art and *Mori*, alone or in combination, fail to teach or suggest all of the features recited in independent claims 1 and 4, as amended. For example, independent claims 1 and 4, as amended, recite "gas discharge means for discharging a gas on the peripheral area in a manner for flattening and maintaining said film circuit board planar."

By contrast, *Mori* is directed to an apparatus for removing unnecessary matter formed on an edge portion of a substrate, i.e., a wafer, by blowing a carrier gas against the substrate. The carrier gas is activated and a plasma containing activated species is then blown against the wafer edge through a gas outlet. The activated species react with the resist which is removed from the wafer edge. However, *Mori* is silent with respect to the noted features recited in independent claims 1 and 4, as amended.

Thus, the inventions of independent claims 1 and 4, as amended, solve a problem recognized by Applicants, whereby a flexible film circuit board being transported by a transport mechanism has an arch and/or fold formed thereon. As a result of such arch formation or folding, a mask image projected onto the flexible film circuit can become blurred, resulting in inaccurate exposure. This is a problem which can arise on film circuit boards, which are flexible, and which is not the case with inflexible substrates, such as the wafers processed in *Mori*.

Advantageously, the invention of independent claims 1 and 4, as amended, solves the noted problems recognized by Applicants during the transport of a film circuit board, by discharging a gas on the peripheral area such that an arch or fold formed on the of the film

circuit board can be made planar and without scratching the bottom surface of the film. Such a procedure, however, is unnecessary in *Mori*.

In addition, *Mori*, FIG. 1, clearly shows that the wafer stage 30 has a much smaller diameter than the wafer 10. Accordingly, apart from the fact that the wafer is rigid and may not be deformed by blowing gas against a surface thereof, there is no support in *Mori* against which the wafer edge could be blown, so that, a flexible substrate could not be used in *Mori* and if used, blowing gas against its periphery, rather than flattening it, would bend its edges downward so that it would not be made or held planar by the effect of the gas.

Applicants' admitted prior art fails to cure the noted deficiencies in *Mori* and thus Applicants' admitted prior art and *Mori*, alone or in combination, fail to teach or suggest "gas discharge means for discharging a gas on the peripheral area in a manner for flattening and maintaining said film circuit board planar," as recited in independent claims 1 and 4.

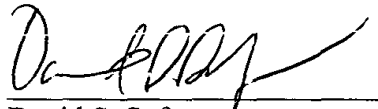
Dependent claims 2-3 and 5-6 are allowable over Applicants' admitted prior art and *Mori*, alone or in combination, on their own merits and for at least the reasons argued above with respect to independent claims 1 and 4.

The prior art that has been cited, but not applied by the Examiner, has been taken into consideration during formulation of this response. However, since this art was not considered by the Examiner to be of sufficient relevance to apply against any of the claims, no detailed comments thereon is believed to be warranted at this time.

While the present application is now believed to be in condition for allowance, should the Examiner find some issue to remain unresolved or should any new issues arise, which could be eliminated through discussions with Applicants' representative, then the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone in order that the further prosecution of this application can thereby be expedited.

Lastly, it is noted that a separate Extension of Time Petition accompanies this response along with a check in payment of the requisite extension of time fee. However, should that petition become separated from this Amendment, then this Amendment should be construed as containing such a petition. Likewise, any overage or shortage in the required payment should be applied to Deposit Account No. 19-2380 (740145-216).

Respectfully submitted,



David S. Safran
Registration No. 27,997

NIXON PEABODY LLP
8180 Greensboro Drive, Suite 800
McLean, VA 22102
Telephone: (703) 770-9315

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